

NOVEMBER, 1943

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This month Supplement of "Mr. Bolfrey"



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Edited by Frances Stephens

November, 1943

Over the Footlights

ROBERT DONAT has taken a lease of the Westminster Theatre where, early in November, he will present the first of a programme of plays which will include new works by known and unknown authors as well as some distinguished plays of the past.

Mr. Donat's object, we understand, is to establish a permanent centre of dramatic interest where playgoers can be assured of a high standard of acting, production and design, while a strong feature of his policy will be to provide opportunities for new talent, not only in the casting of plays, but also in the choice of producers and scenic artists; and to give established actors and actresses an opportunity to get away from type casting and to try their wings in a new range of parts.

The first of this new programme of plays will be *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde. This favourite of the "naughty nineties" was first produced at the Haymarket Theatre in 1895, and nearly thirty years have passed since it was last seen by London audiences. The cast will include Dame Irene Vanbrugh, Rosemary Scott, Peggy Bryan, Nan Hopkins, Rosamund Greenwood, Patricia Jessel, Esme Percy, Manning Whitley, Roland Culver and Ian Lubbock.

Such a scheme is a welcome reminder of the spirit that still burns steadfastly in our theatre and the deep concern of some of our leading actors to promote only the best. In many centres quietly the good work goes on. The Mercury, Notting Hill Gate, is one such. Recently the new season opened with a revival of Masefield's *The Tragedy of Nan*, which was well worth the doing, and incidentally introduced to London a promising young actress in Pauline Letts. Young talent has had its chance, too, in the John Gielgud production of *Landslide*, the play about a party of young climbers marooned for three months in a small Alpine Hotel. If the theme was perhaps too slight to support three acts (many of our young people face sterner adventures every day of

their lives in these unnatural days) there was much to commend the play, particularly the refreshing youthfulness of the cast. Specially remembered are the performances of John Byron as the priest-to-be and Dulcie Gray as the girl he loved.

PRODUCED too late for review this month are *The Love Racket*, the musical comedy which brings Arthur Askey to the Victoria Palace with Carol Raye as leading lady and strong supporting cast, and the Bernard Delfont revival at His Majesty's of Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* with that now well-established team, Barry K. Barnes and Diana Churchill, as the stars.

AMONG future productions news comes of two new Emlyn Williams plays, *Druids' Rest* and *Pen Don*; the former a comedy of Welsh village life and the latter a mediaeval tale of Welsh peasant life on a magic mountain. Both have been written during the past eighteen months, and should reach the West End, after provincial try-outs, early next year. The new Ivor Novello musical, *Arc de Triomphe*, with Mary Ellis, Raymond Lovell, Peter Graves and Elisabeth Welch as the stars, opens at the Phoenix on November 10th, and at the Princes during the last week of November, Firth Shephard is presenting Bobby Howes and Sydney Howard in *Halfway to Heaven*, three-act play by Harry Segall. *The White Cliffs* by Ingram d'Abbe, a play about the Battle of Britain; *To-morrow the World*, a play on the problem of Nazi youth by James Gow and Arnaud d'Usseau, and *The Dough Girls*, a comedy by Joseph Fields, are other Firth Shephard productions expected shortly.

There is a tendency now for shows to adopt the daily matinee with three evening performances only each week arrangement which certainly has much to commend it during the winter months, for more reasons than one.

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New Shows of the Month

"My Sister Eileen"

THE hilarious doings of the Sherwood sisters provide a fine evening's entertainment, obviously to the liking of London playgoers, who can now take it for granted that a Firth Shephard production of an American comedy hit will be a joyful affair.

* * *

My Sister Eileen, by Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov, is set in a basement studio in Greenwich Village, New York. "Studio" we take it is a grand name for these somewhat unsavoury quarters, though it must be confessed the stage set, which is one of the most attractive we have seen, appeared quite "liveable" to us. However, during three riotous acts the inexperienced Sherwood girls, up from the country as it were, discover the snags in rapid succession, from the ever-recurring explosions from the subway construction underneath, to the hard beds, lack of privacy and nasty habits of neighbours known and unknown. Almost every type of humanity finds its way down the stairs, what time the sisters find it well-nigh impossible to turn an honest penny.

Needless to say a lot of this is pure farce requiring one-hundred per cent quick-fire action. At times the pace showed signs of slackening, but it would be sheer ingratitude to lay stress on this in view of the splendid acting and production.

Coral Browne as Ruth Sherwood and Sally Gray as her young sister, Eileen, carry it off with extraordinary aplomb, particularly Miss Browne, whose coolness under every sort of provocation is something to be wondered at. Miss Gray provides the fatal allure that is nearly their undoing, and looks irresistible throughout, though it seemed rather odd that the charm and distinction of Ruth as presented by Coral Browne should have lacked a queue of admirers equally long.

Max Bacon is at the top of his form as Mr. Appopolous, the loquacious landlord, whose accommodating soul can embrace rent-profiteering and high art with equal fervour. There are some neat studies from Charles Farrell as an incredible heavyweight footballer, Harry Ross as a newspaperman, Virginia Winter as Violet, extenant of the studio, Graeme Muir as the young man from the drug store, and Ellis Irving as Robert Baker, an almost too-sane journalist for such surroundings.

* * *

Marcel Varnel has produced with accustomed ease.

F.S.

"My Sister Eileen"—Savoy, Sept. 22nd.

"Something in the Air"—Palace, Sept. 23rd.

"The Tragedy of Nan"—Mercury, Sept. 30th.

"Landslide"—Westminster, Oct. 5th.

"Acacia Avenue"—Vaudeville, Oct. 14th.

"She Follows Me About"—Garrick, Oct. 15th.

"The Dark River"—Whitehall, Oct. 19th.

"Something in the Air"

JACK HULBERT and Cicely Courtneidge are at the Palace again with another admirable musical comedy on the familiar lines that never seem to pall.

This time our hero and heroine gambol through incredible adventures in pursuit of a German airman, themselves pursued by a Cockney R.A.F. sergeant under whom they had served as A.C.2 and W.A.A.F. respectively. En route we see them as happy East Enders, war-time railway travellers and in other disguises a long way from Mr. Hulbert's 1939 dignity as well-to-do pickles manufacturer with which the show opens. Ronald Shiner is the sergeant and he enters into the spirit with a keen sense of the low comedy and knockabout fun that abound throughout the show.

The Manning Sherwin music is consistently good, and Miss Courtneidge scores with "The Air Force Didn't Want Me" and the nostalgic "Home is the Place where your Heart is." Mr. Hulbert's song about peace when it comes, entitled "It'll Take a lot of Getting used to" was another high spot.

Gabrielle Brune and Jean Gillie provide the rival charm that complicates the issue for Miss Courtneidge, and the supporting cast work well. But once again it is a Courtneidge-Hulbert affair first and foremost, with the two stars in fine form. For lively humour, slick comedy and colossal energy they are without rival in the West End; nor is the West End quite the same in their absence. *Something in the Air* is fortunately another winner that will keep them at the Palace for many a month.

Jack Hulbert has produced as well as assisting Buddy Bradley with the dances. The Berkeley Sutcliffe décor is gay and colourful.

F.S.

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20th Century Studio.

JOYCE HERON

(Left):

who is appearing at the Garrick in the new Ben Travers comedy, *She Follows Me About*.

"Acacia Avenue"

THIS "to see ourselves as others see us" kind of play, providing the dialogue is snappy and pertinent, is always a sure winner for laughs. Mabel and Denis Constanduros know their subject and have contrived an amusing comedy in which there is perhaps more satire than meets the eye.

The big surprise is Gordon Harker's realistic performance as Charles Robinson, the likeable suburban father, who in spite of some touches of the familiar accent, is as far removed from the perky Cockney we know so well as chalk from cheese. Mr. Robinson is of the type of lower middle class commonly called "the man in the street" or "the backbone of England," and as the time of the play is pre-war, we don't even have to worry if world events have shaken him out of his accustomed round of 8.40 train to the city, rose growing and annual holidays at Bognor. In fact there might have been no plot at all if Mr. Robinson had not decided to take his wife and daughter on a Mediterranean cruise, and if Joan their daughter had not decided to get engaged and refuse to accompany her parents. Thus, as their motives for visiting Athens were not really sound, the Robinsons senior decided to go to dear old Bognor instead, but to save face—particularly before their snobbish neighbours, the Wilsons—they pretended to do the cruise. In a way they asked for all the troubles, big and little, which met them when they returned to Acacia Avenue a day too soon.

If Gordon Harker is just right as Mr. Robinson, so is Dorothy Hamilton as his scattered-brained wife. Yvonne Owen gives an outstanding performance as Joan, the highly-strung daughter, whose awareness of her fiancé's social superiority almost wrecks

their romance. Hubert Gregg plays the fiancé with excellent restraint and understanding. Other good performances come from Rhoderick Walker as Peter, the Robinsons' son, who gets entangled with an unpleasant little suburban gold-digger, convincingly played by Miki Hood. Doris Rogers and Alfred Farrell as the snobbish neighbours who have been in the habit of cruising apparently for years, are duly inquisitive and unpleasant, and a special word is owed to Megs Jenkins for her gem of a performance as Shirley, the Robinsons' maid.

The apt Constanduros dialogue is everywhere in evidence, and there are many amusing situations, particularly in the last act.

F.S.

"She Follows Me About"

TO see Robertson Hare as a misunderstood little parson doing locum tenens at the seaside is something like the answer to a theatregoer's prayer, especially when he is being persecuted by a particularly grim-looking Watch Committee. Nor could we ask more than that he should indulge in much back-slapping and coyness with a real Bishop, believing him to be bogus, what time the said Church dignitary is investigating the little man's alleged crimes, particularly a couple of snaps of two attractive girls in the "altogether," of which he, Robertson Hare, is, needless to say, belligerently unaware.

Ben Travers has written another side-splitting farce which magnificently exploits Robertson Hare's unique comedy sense. The Reverend Cuffe emerges as a real personality and something of an ill-used crusader against the petty hypocracies that abound in the narrow circles of small seaside towns, apparently even in war-time. Indeed the fervour of some of the dialogue indicates that Mr. Travers may have more than a farcical axe to grind. The parson's wife, as played by Catherine Lacey, is a gloriously "batty" person, and Joyce Heron and Pauline Tennant are the glamorous W.A.A.F. girls on holiday, whose youthful mischief-making antics with the Cuffe camera cause so much trouble. It is left to their rather casual friend (Basil Radford) to extricate the "padre" from his dilemma; not that he is altogether successful as is witnessed by numerous encounters with the policeman (Noel Morris) and his buxom daughter (Coleen Morris); the leader of the Watch Committee (Percy Parsons); the bogus bishop (Alan Welch) and the genuine one

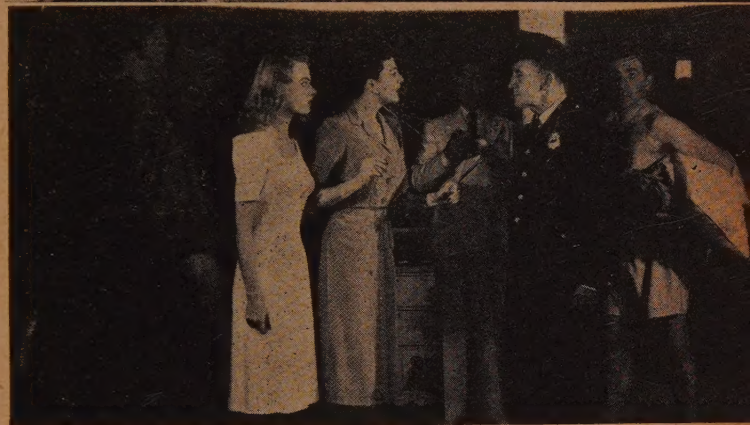
(Continued on page 8)

(Right): The Sherwood sisters arrive in Greenwich Village, New York, in search of a room, and with many misgivings are finally persuaded by Mr. Appopolous to rent his basement studio.

(Left to right): Sally Gray as Eileen, Coral Browne as Ruth, and Max Bacon as Mr. Appopolous.



(Right): One of the many awkward moments for the inexperienced sisters with (left to right) Harry Ross as Chic Clark, Graeme Muir as Frank Lippencott, Charles Rolfe as the Policeman and Charles Farrell as the Wreck.



(Below): Another hilarious scene with Chic Clark and the Wreck, and (below right), Carol Browne as Ruth and Robert Baker as Ellis Irving in the happy ending.

“My Sister Eileen” at the Savoy



(Eric Messiter). The father of one of the Girls, Admiral Hardy-Hardy (Aubrey Mallalieu), adds confusion to the general situation, in which John Wynn as a young army officer is far from disinterested. In support are Josephine Dent as the vicarage "daily," Daphne Riggs as the Bishop's wife and Sam Lysons, Ian Peters and Gordon James as other members of the Watch Committee.

F.S.

"The Dark River"

THE characters in this play for the most part are odd people. One would be surprised to meet them in real life, and yet Rodney Ackland has the gift of making them live. He has a deft way with backgrounds; it is right that this ill-assorted group should be met in 1937 in a quiet Thames backwater, groping their way as it were through the years between the two wars; all but one of them with no realisation whatever of the significance of the Spanish war or the noise of practice bombers and anti-aircraft guns which punctuates the story. It is, of course, only now, in 1943, that we can be fully aware ourselves of the import, for at least the characters are true to our pre-war lives in their refusal to face facts; a blindness which Mr. Ackland weaves into the very texture of their purposeless existence.

Lifted out of its wider significance the story is that of Catherine Lisle, who comes to the home of her old schoolmistress, Ella Merriman, an eccentric woman of many good parts, nursing the memory of her son, killed in the last war, like an obsession, and looking to the needs of her aged father and lively young pupil, Mervyn, with a firm sense of duty. Catherine brings with her for her summer stay Gwendolen Mulville, a would-be glamour girl and gold digger of pre-war vintage. Catherine wants to forget her ex-husband, Christopher, in the security of these childhood surroundings, and in spite of an inherent weakness in her character, very nearly does so with the aid of her lover, Alan Crocker, the one rock-like personality who sees the drift of the world and is bent on providing deep air raid shelters for future war victims. But Catherine loses her lover through her own inability to cut with the past, and at curtain fall is left with Christopher, the weak and ineffective.

Catherine is played with real sympathy and understanding by Peggy Ashcroft. Nadine March gets the laughs as Gwen and Susan Richmond contributes a wonderful character study as Ella Merriman. Michael Golden is splendidly solid as Alan and Ronald Simpson brings a note of pathos to his study of the feckless Christopher. There is a clever study of a piece of post-last-war "flotsam" by Ivor Barnard as Stanley Maltby who becomes Mrs. Merriman's manservant pro tem. Lawrence Hanray is old

Mr. Veness—a perfect piece of acting, and Ronald Langdon is Mervyn, the boy pupil. Other visitors to this "Heartbreak House" include Edmund Reade (Wilfrid Walter), a once great film maker, who like so many in the play, lives in the past. Rodney Ackland himself directs.

F.S.

(Reference to *Landslide* and *The Tragedy of Nan* will be found on page 3.)



LYDIA KYASHT BALLET

(Left):

BEBE
DE ROLAND
eighteen-year-old New Zealand ballerina with the Kyasht Ballet during the recent season at the Whitehall.

DEFINITELY the worst thing about this company is its pretentious and inaccurate name, "Russian Ballet de la Jeunesse Anglaise." The standard of classical dancing is high for so modest a group; crisp, neat and only marred by a tendency to "musical comedy" presentation of personality. This is particularly unfortunate in the case of Bébé de Roland, for in the *Casse Noisette* Adagio and Variation this young dancer showed splendid attack and sharpness of beat. In all the other dances the choreography should be labelled "after Petipa" (what, incidentally, has happened to the *Valse des Flûtes*?). The new ballet of Lydia Kyasht, Junr., *Heraldic*, had plenty of colour and some competent dances in the pre-Fokine formula, but in *Marie Antoinette* both the theme and Mozart's music proved too great for the choreographer, Catherine Marks. In both these ballets there was a lack of feeling for period "style": a hallmark of the immature choreographer.

A.W.

FREDERICK VALK and Nora Swinburne have taken over the roles of Kurt and Sarah Muller in *Watch on the Rhine* at the Aldwych. This allows Miss Wynyard to go on a nine-weeks' E.N.S.A. tour in *Gashlight*, with Roger Livesey, Ursula Jeans and Robert Andrews.

"THIS is the Army," the Irving Berlin show, its cast entirely of U.S. soldiers, will be produced next month at the Palladium. All proceeds will go to British war charities. After some weeks in London, the show will visit leading provincial cities.

“Mr. Bolfry” AT THE PLAYHOUSE



Mr. McCrimmon: Put my hat in the box, girl.

The minister returns from service in his usual Sabbath mood. (Left to right): Sophie Stewart as Mrs. McCrimmon, Alfred Bass^a as Cohen, Dorothy Smith as Morag, the servant girl, Alastair Sim as Mr. McCrimmon and Ronald Millar as Cully.

SCENES and FRONT COVER STUDY BY JOHN VICKERS.

JAMES BRIDIE'S latest work is certain to rank as one of the most brilliant plays of the war years if not the best yet from the pen of this distinguished playwright. With rare skill he has contrived a comedy packed full of erudite pronouncements on the age-old theological controversies without once losing grip of his audience.

This he has achieved by choosing the stern atmosphere of a Free Kirk Manse in the West Highlands as his setting, against which background he gives free play to the pent-up feelings of a group of young discontents who by means of some ancient witchcraft conjure up the Devil himself to confound the sophistry of their aggravatingly pious host. The result is as brilliantly funny as anything in the West End for many a year.

The play, which is presented by Linnit and Dunfee, Ltd., in association with Alastair Sim and Roy Limbert, is directed by Mr. Sim, who gives one of the best

performances of his career as the dour Scotch minister who is shaken out of his complacency by the extraordinary happenings in his own Manse parlour. Walter Fitzgerald is mischievously sinister as Mr. Bolfry, intriguing Duke of Darkness, and Sophie Stewart gives a delicious performance as the Minister's imperturbable little wife. Alfred Bass plays with great skill the part of Cohen, the young Cockney soldier billetee, who is bored nearly to tears in these unfriendly surroundings, and Cully, his more refined fellow-soldier sufferer, is presented with a nice sense of contrast by John Millar. Sheila Brownrigg appears as Jean, Mr. McCrimmon's niece, an outspoken young lady from London, who stages the big showdown. There remains Dorothy Smith's telling portrayal of Morag the servant girl who is built on more elemental lines.

Mr. Bolfry has settled down to a solid success at the Playhouse Theatre after its brilliant short season at the Westminster.



(Above left):

Cohen: That's me and the old trouble-and-strife

Cohen shows Mrs McCrimmon some family snaps.

(Above):

Cohen: Any skirt's anybody's type in a place like this. You're a cissy that's what you are.

The young anti-aircraft gunners find life very boring in off-duty hours in the rarified atmosphere of the Manse and their nerves become somewhat frayed.

(Left):

Cohen: I've already got my opinion on most of these books, lady. I hope you have an enjoyable swim.

The minister's niece Jean, just arrived from London for a rest after the raids, provides a welcome distraction for the boys. (Sheila Brownrigg as Jean.)

rag: Dear me! Aren't you
e awful man and a great
anger to the neighbourhood!

hen begins to make head-
ay with the seemingly
nocent servant girl, who
however, not averse to a
little illicit flirting.



hen: I am sorry, I had to
gh. Think of him blowing out
mes instead of beer. Battery,
tails up!

he awful moment when
t. McCrimmon finds his
ests drinking tea on the
bath and indulging in
seemly hilarity. Mr. Mc-
crimon's pained manner
ouses Jean's indignation
d a fierce theological argu-
ment ensues.



McCrimmon: You are all
le blind, semi-conscious crea-
es tossing about in a tempest
of skim milk.

e young people are no
tch for Mr. McCrimmon's
iectics. They resolve to
kle him by other means.





That night Jean, Cully Cohen and Morag—the latter two dragged from their rendezvous in the wash-house—gather in the parlour and with the aid of an old book on witchcraft, make the necessary cabalistic signs around the table. On the stroke of midnight, to their utter amazement, Mr. Bolfry, in the guise of a minister of the Church of Scotland, makes his sudden entrance to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning.

(Left): Walter Fitzgerald as Mr. Bolfry.

(Below):

Mr. Bolfry: We cannot conceive the universe except as a pattern of reciprocal opposites—can we my love?

Mr. McCrimmon and his wife, disturbed by the noise downstairs, have joined the young people within the circle of chalk round the table, what time Mr. Bolfry, fortified with numerous glasses of whisky, begins his spell-binding peroration.





Mr. Bolfry: I am an ordained Minister of Religion.

Mr. McCrimmon: Do you tell me that? Where were you ordained?

Mr. Bolfry: At Geneva in 1590.

Mr. McCrimmon: Get thee behind me Satan!

Mr. McCrimmon, convinced that this is an ugly dream, nevertheless finds himself drawn into close argument with the wily visitor.

(Below):

Mr. Bolfry: Not that I am really dangerous. We are mischievous and fond of experiments.

Mr. Bolfry continues to hold the stage, mocking first one and then another and demonstrating with cunning skill that evil after all is essential to the working out of the Divine Purpose in the universe.





Mr. McCrimmon: Mr. Bolfry, let me assure you it has been on the whole a pleasure to meet you.

It is not long before Mr. McCrimmon finds himself in agreement with Mr. Bolfry and goes so far as to step outside the magic circle to hobnob with the emissary of the Devil.



Mr. Bolfry: By the throne of thunder and the canopy of eternal night.

Back again, the perplexed Free Kirk minister draws the line at allowing Mr. Bolfry to preach from his pulpit in the church. Mrs. McCrimmon, however, is quite equal to the occasion and, helping the mollified visitor into her husband's gown, and bands, arranges a nice little service around the dining room table.



Mr. Bolfry: I, the Devil, am Fire and Water. I hoist the gallows and drive the pike between the ribs.

Mr. Bolfry proceeds with his sermon, interrupted at intervals by members of his congregation. At last, however, Mr. McCrimmon can stand no more of it.



Mr. McCrimmon: If you are, as I think you are, the voice of my own heart speaking evil, I will tear you from my breast, if I die for it.

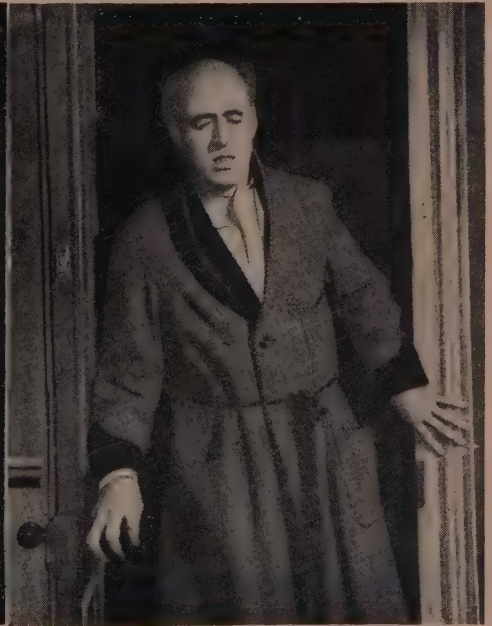
(Below):

Mr. Bolfry: You will have it, will you? Come along, then. Let's see you hunt the Devil over the moor.

Mr. Bolfry taunts the minister into pursuing him out into the night. Cully and Cohen, horrified by the turn of events, follow after.

(Below):

The dramatic moment when Mr. McCrimmon returns, knife in hand, and exhausted. He had chased the Devil to the edge of the cliff, the soldiers arriving just in time to see the body plunge into the sea and disappear in a cloud of steam.





Mr. McCrimmon: I have been too confident about too much.

Mr. McCrimmon comes to his senses and finding an almost empty bottle of whisky he is persuaded into thinking that his meeting with the Devil is the result of drink. This is indeed something new for Cully and Cohen, who begin to wonder themselves if the incredible happenings of the night had really taken place.



Mrs. McCrimmon: The soldiers have to be out for their runnings and jumpings.

Next morning at breakfast, Jean, shaken to her depths by the night's adventure, finds her aunt in her most cheerful and nonchalant mood.



Mrs. McCrimmon: We're a wee thing late and I have to check over the linen for the washing before I go down for the messages.

In the cold light of day no-one is really sure about the weird events of the night, and the minister's wife has no difficulty in persuading Morag at least that she spent the night firm, asleep in her bed. For the rest, the minister, subdued and penitent, has lost most of his complacency, convinced that he had given way to a secret vice.

Indeed all might have passed into the

limbo of unexplained and forgotten things had not Jean spotted Mr. Bolfry's umbrella nestling against the fireplace. Mr. Bolfry, however, was quickness itself, and the petrified onlookers see the indisputable evidence walk out of the house apparently on its own. The last word is with the minister's wife who, knowing the ways of sprites and pixies in the Highlands, assures them it might have been much worse.

More Notes on Sadler's Wells

By
Audrey Williamson



Right:

FREDERICK ASHTON

who has been responsible for the choreography of some of the greatest ballets in the Sadler's Wells repertoire. A complete list of Mr. Ashton's ballets appears in Arnold Haskell's new book, *The National Ballet*, reviewed in this article.

AN interesting aspect of the recent Sadler's Wells Ballet season was the opportunity given, in the absence of a new ballet, to study some new performances in the existing repertoire. Two of these, Pauline Clayden's portrayal of Una in *The Quest* and Julia Farron's of the Lady in *Comus*, had a special importance in stressing the acting, as well as the dancing, potentialities upon which the English ballet is now able to draw. Pauline Clayden, dancing Una during the illness of Margot Fonteyn, gave a performance which was wistful, eager and touched with a delicate and nervous insight. Julia Farron's opening dance as the Lady was too brittle and startled for the music; it lacked the fluent and limpid awe with which both Margot Fonteyn and Beryl Grey set the tone of the character. The quality of fear, however, was finely sustained, and this dancer's acting of the second scene, alive to horror, but with a flare of pride that gave a tragic stature to her frozen immobility, was worthy of Milton's conception.

Pauline Clayden's Dawn in *Coppelia* was less successful, needing more balance in carriage and some smoothening of the arabesque turns. Her assets are the straight, well-moulded legs of the ballerina, an unusual, grave, piquant little face and an intelligent feeling for the spirit of every part

she takes. She now needs to add suppleness to the sweep of her arms and to guard against the danger of affected, spreading fingers. Beryl Grey's Ophelia proved touching and appealing, but she is too young to express the feeling of tragic helplessness and lurking terror that makes Margot Fonteyn's performance so pitiful (it is astonishing in a new book to find Fonteyn's Ophelia labelled "harsh").

Robert Helpmann's *Comus* was an interesting revival this season. The opening Rout was always the weakest point in this ballet, but Helpmann has now sharpened the effect of *Comus'* first entrance by having him borne on the stage shoulder high. The Rout gains in massed pattern, and this is worth the loss of the unusual shoulder movements. The temporary omission of the verse emphasises how effective this was both in dramatically pointing a static group and in helping to retain something of the greatness of Milton's original. A ballet is a bad ballet if speech is used to illustrate action the choreographer has failed to make clear by movement, but Helpmann's introduction of the two speeches in *Comus* had a different purpose; it was a legitimate attempt to bring into ballet the spirit of the Masque, in which poetry, as well as music and dance, was an essential element. The

(Continued on page 30)



The New Le Lac des Cygnes

PICTURES BY
TUNBRIDGE-SEDGWICK.

Following his brilliant debut with Robert Helpmann's *Hamlet*, Leslie Hurry has confirmed his position as one of the most outstanding contemporary theatre designers with his décor and costumes for the new Sadler's Wells production of *Lac des Cygnes*. Above left, Margot Fonteyn is seen as Odette in the second act. The other two pictures show Robert Helpmann as Prince Siegfried and Margot Fonteyn as the wicked Odile in the third act.





Above: Leslie Hurry's décor for the second act showing his imaginative introduction of the swan motif.
Below: The spectacular Palace scene in the third act, with the Pas de Trois danced by Joan Sheldon, Alexis Rassine and Margaret Dale.



PEGGY ASHCROFT

A striking new portrait of Peggy Ashcroft who has returned to the theatre after an absence of some months in Rodney Ackland's new play, *The Dark River* at the Whitehall. Miss Ashcroft gives a most sensitive performance as Catherine Lisle, particularly in the big emotional scenes with Michael Golden.

*Portrait by
John Vickers.*

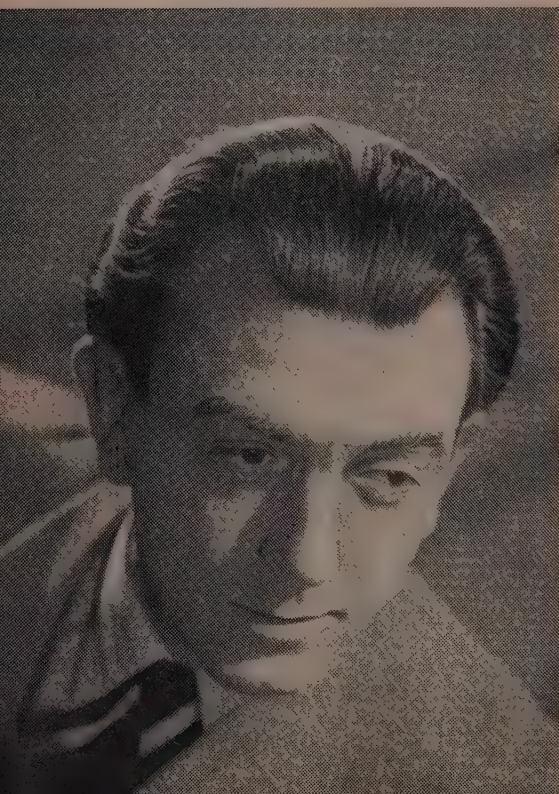


In the News

JOHN CLEMENTS

who has greatly enhanced his reputation as one of our leading younger actors with his magnificent performance as Joe Dinmore in J. B. Priestley's successful play *They Came to a City*, which is now well past its 200th performance at the Globe Theatre. News also comes that Mr. Clements is to produce the new play about the R.A.F. during the Battle of Britain by the well-known author "Blake."

*Portrait by
John Vickers.*



Theatre on Wheels

By L. Yantariev

AN INTERESTING SIDELIGHT ON A
BRANCH OF SOVIET THEATRICAL
ACTIVITY WHICH BEARS SOME RELATION
TO OUR ENSA COMPANIES

THE Central Transport Theatre has opened in Moscow after a long absence. It has been on a big tour. After the first show was over, I dropped in for a chat with the Art Director, Nikolai Petrov, who bears the title of Merited Art Worker. He described how this transport theatre travelled on the railways of Siberia, the Urals, across Baikalia and far east for 22 months. It had started out on this journey before the war and at that time had many shows prepared. But when war broke out, the theatre decided upon producing a play that would express the people's wrath and hatred of the enemy and summon Soviet patriots to struggle against Fascism. So Petrov began rehearsals of Afinogenov's play *On Eve*. It presents the life of the Soviet people in the fighting line and on the home front just before the Red Army's offensive in the winter of 1941. Following that, they started work on a play by brothers Tour, *Smoke of Our Country*, about the partisans. Its heroes are those in whom live the valour and optimism of a nation defending its honour. Later there was a stage adaptation of the pamphlet, *Further Adventures of the Valiant Shveik*, by Maurice Slobodskoy. The theatre also produced Konstantine Simonov's *Russian People* and Boris Romashev's *It Might Happen to Anyone*.

Concert for Railway Workers

The conditions under which the actors had to play showed no lack of variety. There was one occasion when a trolley towing two flat-cars approached the train at eight o'clock in the morning. A few minutes later the actors were already seated on these flat-cars and the trolley was on its way. They were going to give a concert for the railway workers whom they had to pick up on the road. The audience were mainly composed of track men and switch men who were off duty. The theatre has given shows sometimes three or four times daily at dozens of stations and villages.

Audiences Large and Small

Sometimes the audience was ranged in an amphitheatre of many thousands to listen to the actors speaking from motor lorries; sometimes the audience was smaller than

the cast. Frontier men returning from their patrol duty occupied no more than one bench.

On arrival at the place where the unit was stationed, the theatre people saw that the club could not accommodate a twentieth part of those desiring to attend, so they resolved to give the show in the open air. The stage was a low hill before which an audience of many thousands was assembled. Each member of the cast had to give a great deal of consideration to the question of how best to reach the audience from this unusual stage.

At the conclusion, cavalry appeared pursuing the "Enemy." The riders were actors. The unit command had provided the theatre with a chance to produce this military play on a scale of which producers in the Capital might dream.

Assisting Amateur Players

The theatre rehearsed and produced seven new shows in all on the subject of patriotic war. The actors and producers gave regular assistance to the railway employees and amateur dramatic circles. Poets and composers wrote many songs on the Soviet people's struggle against Fascism and these were practised with the audience and widely circulated.

The Role of the Artist in War

"I often ask myself the question," said Petrov, "have I done everything that could be done by an artist who has been entrusted with the task of helping to defeat the enemy through Art and not with a rifle in hand? What is the chief, basic thing that determines the degree of necessity and rightness of your work? To be a part of your country's life, and subordinate all your thoughts, feelings, wishes and actions to one purpose—the extermination of Fascism? There are not, there cannot be, any other thoughts, any other desires for a Soviet patriot or a Soviet artist. Our theatre has followed this path." I went out into the darkened Moscow street with Petrov. "The train with our theatres is quite near here. Its last tour was to be over 2,300 kilometres along the road to the East. Everything in it is now ready for us to start Westwards to the liberated districts of our country."



Sadler's Wells Opera

The Sadler's Wells Opera Company returned to the New Theatre on October 20th for a six weeks' season. Here are four of the principal artistes: *Above left*, Ben Williams, one of the leading tenors; *above*, Joan Cross, soprano, who is also director of the Company; *below left*, John Hargreaves, baritone; and *below right*, Edith Coates, the leading contralto.



From our
American
Correspondent
E. MAWBY GREEN

(Right):

ELISABETH BERGNER in a scene from *The Two Mrs. Carrolls*, which marks her return to the stage at the Booth Theatre. Miss Bergner's vivid personality is nothing dimmed after her long absence from the theatre.

Picture by Vandamm Studio.



Echoes from Broadway

ELISABETH BERGNER is back on Broadway. It is eight years since she appeared for the first time on the New York stage in *Escape Me Never*. That her popularity has not diminished during this long absence away from the footlights is apparent from the reception accorded her performance in *The Two Mrs. Carrolls*, by Martin Vale. This is the same play London willingly endured for over a year in 1935. Since that time several tryouts have been staged beyond reach of the New York critics, but none considered exciting enough to set up on Broadway.

It must be assumed that Miss Bergner, in her eagerness to get back on the stage, grew tired of waiting for the right script to come along, so, in desperation, threw in her lot with the tortured Sally, the second of the two Mrs. Carrolls.

It may have seemed a better play when London took to it, but since that time we have had, and still have, *Angel Street*, which, for psychological melodrama, seems to beat off all trespassers on its sacred territory, for *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* has little to commend it except what Miss Bergner contributes. That is considerable and

almost an evening in itself. She flings herself around the stage with a fascination that holds you spellbound, particularly in the middle of the play, the scene where the first Mrs. Carroll (Vera Allen) is trying to convince her that she is being slowly poisoned by Geoffrey (Victor Jory), the over-amorous husband. Here Miss Bergner is magnificent. She has something tangible to work with and you forget the shallowness of those stage tricks. In the beginning of the play she is less fortunate. There is too much talk for no apparent purpose, which means Miss Bergner must turn herself almost inside out to keep your attention. Such whisks of whimsy, like having climbed the stairs once with the affectionate aid of her husband, suddenly decides she liked it and returns to the foot of the stairs to do it all over again. This places an added strain on the banisters, as well as on the more captious section of the audience. You are always afraid she will want to do it a third time. Fortunately, she does not, and the play is allowed to talk its way on to things more dramatic.

Everybody seems thankful for *The Two Mrs. Carrolls*, if only for the fact that it

has brought Miss Bergner out of seclusion. Now she is in the limelight again it is hoped a play more worthy of her magic and exceptional stage power will come to her rescue. Reginald Denham directed and Frederick Fox has supplied two settings of the South of France that make you positively lonely for the French Riviera.

Another importation from the West End is *Murder Without Crime*, by J. Lee Thompson. The critics brushed this one off with more or less casual indifference. The production lacked polish and smoothness, possibly because Director Bretaigne Windust had to take over at the last moment one of the two leading male parts, that of Stephen. Henry Daniell plays Matthew, the sadistic landlord, and does wonders with it. Viola Keats and Frances Tannehill are the two women in the piece. Since this melodrama has only one set and four characters, it is reasonably certain of staying around for a month or two, and for people who like this sort of thing, there is a moderately exciting and entertaining evening in it.

New Dodie Smith Play

A bit later on we are promised a production of Dodie Smith's new romantic drama, *Lovers and Friends*, with Katherine Cornell as the star and co-producer, with John C. Wilson. This should be one of the more distinguished events of the season. Now in rehearsal is Frederick Lonsdale's newest comedy, *Another Love Story*, which co-stars Roland Young and Margaret Lindsay, and is being directed by Edmond Goulding. Margaret Sullivan is also expected from Hollywood to appear in a new play by John van Druten, with Elliot Nugent and Audrey Christie comprising the rest of the cast.

More Musical Revivals

Meantime, the trend towards musicals continues, since *Rosalinda* caught the public's fancy months ago, which is the New Opera Company's version of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* (The Bat) and said to have been acquired for London presentation. Also, everybody has been looking back with a nostalgic eye on other operatic successes. The Shuberts have restored with a good deal of pleasure and success Everett Marshall in *The Student Prince*, to be followed by a revival of *Blossom Time*. Russell Janney's former musical triumph, *The Vagabond King*, with the metropolitan star, John Brownlee, is proving too costly to run, so will forsake Broadway for the road, after fifty-five performances. Recently arrived is Jan Kiepura and Marta Eggerth in the New Opera Company production of *The Merry Widow*, with Melville Cooper. Mr. Kiepura and Miss Eggerth seem to have discovered a large and enthusiastic audience over here and have been greeted with encouraging success. Mr.

Kiepura has lost none of his vocal appeal or vigour and has injected into the Franz Lehár score a Polish number, "Kuiawiak," which he puts over to tremendous applause. To add further distinction to this revival, Robert Stolz is conducting the orchestra, which duty he performed when *The Merry Widow* had its premiere in 1905 in Vienna's famous Theatre an der Wien.

Leon Greanin's all-Russian musical revue, a new version of Balieff's *Chauve Souris* 1943, has been received with disappointment and regret, as has the revival of Hal Johnson's *Run Little Chillun*, a play with music and all-coloured cast.

Now listed with the current musical successes is *Early To Bed*, book and lyrics by George Marion, Jr., and music by Thomas ("Fats") Waller, presented by Richard Kollmar. Carl Brisson was originally signed to appear in the rôle played by Mr. Kollmar—that of a retired bull-fighter, with red scarf appeal, but Mr. Brisson apparently found the part unsuited to him and withdrew during rehearsals and is on view at a New York night club instead.

The book of *Early To Bed* is, to put it nicely, undistinguished, and concerned with a "beautiful" bordello on the island of Martinique, which, in order to complicate the love angle, pretends to be a girls' school—the girls are really ravishing. Fortunately, the plot gets pushed in the background by sheer superiority of the performers, the lavishly colourful costumes by Miles White and scenery by George Jenkins, and the excellent ensemble numbers by Robert Alton. The big show-stopper is a take-off of "The Ladies who Sing with a Band," done marvellously by Muriel Angelus, Mary Small, Jane Kean and Jane Deering. Ably supporting the successful Mr. Kollmar at the male end are principally Bob Howard, a popular coloured radio comedian, and George Zoritch, a pleasant recruit from the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The music is typical "Fats" Waller stuff: more trumpet than tune; but in line with the rest of the proceedings. It is easy to like *Early To Bed* once the abundance of talent is permitted to rise and shine.

"Let's Face It" Successor for London?

Michel Todd's smash musical, *Something for the Boys*, is now in its eighth month. It is reported London is to have its own version in due course. The book is by Herbert and Dorothy Fields and the music by Cole Porter, the same combination responsible for *Let's Face It*.

We found much more to like in *Something for the Boys* than we did in *Let's Face It*, possibly because producer Michael Todd has taken no chances and poured everything he could into the production from the standpoint of performance, costumes and scenic effects.

(Right):

A scene from *Oklahoma!* the unusual musical production which has proved one of the biggest Theatre Guild successes to date.



Ethel Merman is the star and Mr. Porter's favourite interpreter of his unforgettable flashy rhymes and rhythms. The song hits this time include "Could It Be You," "Hey, Good Lookin'," "He's a Right Guy," and "Something for the Boys." Then there is a sensational comedy murder, "By the Mississinewa," which Miss Merman puts over in feathers and other choice Indian wear, with the brilliant assistance of dead-pan comedienne, Paula Lawrence. For laughs in the male division, there are Allen Jenkins and William Lynn. Mr. Jenkins, in a tough gangster-ish type of part, crashes a rich dowager's tea party and stops everything, when he takes his first sip of tea and exclaims: "So *THIS* is tea!" Bill Johnson is extremely likeable in the romantic lead, vocally and otherwise, and for tap dancing there is the terrific Betty Bruce and sixteen-year-old Bill Callahan. Settings by Howard Bay, dances by Jack Cole, costumes by Billy Livingstone, staging and lighting by Hassard Short. All that is necessary to ensure the success of *Something for the Boys* in London is to dress it up in equally resplendent fashion with top-notch talent.

Another musical sellout, now in its fourth month, is a new edition of the *Ziegfeld Follies*, which the Shuberts have presented in association with Alfred Bloomingdale and Lou Walters by arrangement with Billie Burke Ziegfeld.

The Shuberts have become quite adept by putting on these lush musical revues. The current *Follies* might lack the breathtaking elegance that was such a well-known trademark of the late Florenz Ziegfeld productions, but there is enough glamour and appeal about this latest edition to keep your eyes popping and your mind merry.

For comedy the operations have been built mainly around Milton Berle. A hard fellow to get off the stage until he has pierced your resistance. He will try anything once to test you for laughs, kick with the chorus, attach himself to an acrobatic

team . . . even go very, very British on you and pull a Noel Coward. He changes his gags to suit his audience and fires them so fast if they don't get you on the first shot, they catch you on the rebound, which means you are laughing pretty much all the time. You are bound to like him before the performance is over, no matter what your ideas about him were before you came in. For additional humour there is the tall and sober Arthur Treacher, and Sue Ryan. Up for the first time from vaudeville, Miss Ryan is something to watch with a song and skit. Leading the dance specialities are Jack Cole, Nadine Gae and Tommy Wonder, each different and distinguished and fitted in to bring out the best in them. For glamour, we have Ilona Massey and a glorified line of American girls, in gorgeously revealing costumes designed by Miles White, against seductive scenery by Watson Barratt. There is much more that should be mentioned about the new *Ziegfeld Follies*, including Cora and Bill Bairs, who do amazing things with puppets, but altogether it is a colossal evening of elegant entertainment.

Big Theatre Guild Success

In *Oklahoma!* the Theatre Guild has one of the biggest successes in its long and distinguished career. It has turned out to be the major attraction of the year and the show everybody is waiting hopefully to see.

Although *Oklahoma!* is based on the play, *Green Grows the Lilacs*, by Lynn Riggs, seen here some twelve years ago, and takes place on the Indian territory (now Oklahoma) just after the turn of the century, it is nothing more than the story of how boy gets girls after singing and dancing through the usual complications. But *Oklahoma!* cannot be dismissed as casually as that. For Richard Rodgers (writing for the first time without his former "hit" partner, Lawrence Hart) has composed one of his most captivating scores, and Oscar

(Continued on page 32)



Felta.

Lively scene from *Strike a New Note*, George Black's new-style musical, which introduces to the London stage a host of promising youngsters, and in Sid Field the biggest comedian discovery in years.

Irving the Man

LOVERS of the theatre who were fortunate enough to have heard it, will have enjoyed the broadcast given by Gerald Lawrence, the seventy-year-old actor, a week or so ago. Mr. Lawrence, whose finely modulated voice added greatly to the charm of the many interesting anecdotes he had to tell, was associated with Sir Henry Irving during the three years before his death. Here are one or two extracts from his talk which are well-worth recalling.

Of his first meeting, following Irving's letter in which he suggested a part for him in *Dante* in England and America, Mr. Lawrence said:—

"Soon after this . . . Irving wrote to me again, asking if I would come to his flat in Stratton Street where he would read the play to me—I don't remember a great deal about the flat, but I do remember seeing there Sargent's lovely portrait of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth. Irving had a marvellously magnetic personality. He greeted me courteously and I had at once the sense of being in the presence of a really great man. He read the play to me, and the play was rubbish, but his characterisation and variety, the charm of his reading voice and his acting of every character, gave the play a false value and it was a triumph of personality over poor material.

And what more illuminating than this:—

"When *Dante* at Drury Lane came to an end, we set sail for America. The weather was not too

good going down channel, and by the time we were off the Cornish coast there was a fairly heavy sea running. I was not feeling particularly grand on the first night out, so I turned in early—at about 9.30. Presently there was a knock at the door, and Walter—Irving's personal servant—came in and said, 'The Guv'nor would like to see you, sir.' Unwillingly I got up, dressed and made my way to the Chief's suite, feeling pretty cheap. He was sitting at a table on which was a bottle of brandy, and a particular jar, made air-tight for his cigars at sea—he greeted me with, 'You don't look too good, my boy! Sit down!' He then proceeded to pour out half a tumbler of his very fine brandy to which he added a little—very little—water. 'Drink this,' he said, 'and you'll feel better.' That was the beginning of an evening as fresh in my memory after forty years as it was on the following morning. He started by talking of the actors of long ago. He said that probably Edmund Kean had greater moments than any actor who had ever lived—told me the most striking Shakespearean performance he had ever seen was Salvini's *Othello*. He read me bits of *Hamlet* which, alas, I never saw him play. . . .

"He spoke of the supper-parties he used to give in the Beefsteak Room in the Lyceum days—my goodness, what parties they must have been, attended by all the greatest figures in art, music, politics, science. King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, was a constant guest. I looked at my watch, and it said three o'clock. I'd forgotten about the pitching; I'd forgotten that we were even afloat; and when we said, 'Good morning,' he remarked with his wonderful smile, 'You look like a different man!'"

Public Slave . . .

THE STARS NEED YOUR APPLAUSE

says

Eric Johns.

ACTORS are often laughed at for claiming to be slaves of the public. I have heard a facetious "Oh yeah!" float down from the Gallery when a touring star's Saturday evening curtain speech has referred to the artist as the slave of the audience. Artists enjoy flattering their "dear public," but when they claim to be your slave, you really ought to believe them. Marie Tempest, who trod the boards with the proud gait of an Empress, was perfectly sincere when she professed to be "your humble servant."

You, as a playgoer, wield immense power in the theatre. Apart from creating stars, you determine the quality of each of their performances. If your playgoing is to be taken as seriously as the star treats his acting, you should pay the fullest attention to his work, and so wholeheartedly concentrate upon the figure on the stage that together you will be capable of producing a superb performance. The actor will warm to your response and rise to heights which would be beyond his scope if faced by an audience of Hottentots.



JULIA NEILSON

remembered the applause on the first night of *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* as one of the most inspiring occasions of her career.

The younger generation now attending the theatre have been brought up on a diverse diet of radio, gramophone and talkies. As all their entertainment has been mechanised since the cradle, they quite fail to realise when they start going to the theatre that they, too, are part of the performance, and, in consequence, they fail to get the best out of the players. Emotionally, these youngsters are far too reserved; but if only they could be persuaded to applaud occasionally, they would rocket the actors to artistic heights undreamt of in their present philosophy.

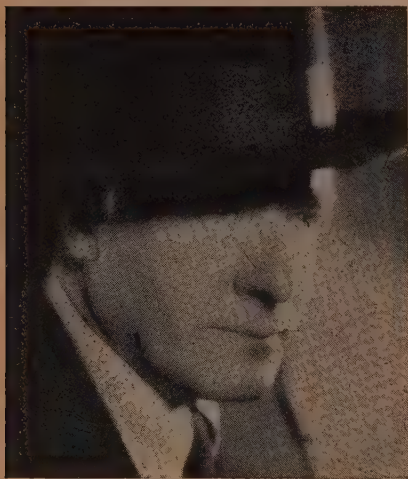
Actors are invariably depressed by scenes which pass without applause. When John Gielgud produced *Romeo and Juliet*, the acts were arranged in such a way that the front curtain only descended once during the evening. The speed of the play was simply electrifying, as it swept on to the final tragedy, and, in consequence, a scene would often pass without a handclap. Gielgud admitted that this certainly did no harm to the play, but it quite definitely had a depressing effect upon the players.

This craving for applause on the part of the actor is not to be despised. It does not imply a longing to have his vanity flattered; all he seeks is an assurance that the audience is really with him. He can sense their co-operation across the footlights, and with their packing he knows that he can go so much further than he could alone. The Channel swimmer, the oarsman, and the runner, all like to have supporters come and shout for them, not because they want to hear people blowing their trumpets, but because with a sign of friendly co-operation, they know full well that they are capable of performing the impossible.

Somerset Maugham, who probably mixed less with theatre people than any other successful dramatist of our time, and therefore, by virtue of this detachment, is better able to judge the relationship between player and public, says: "*The audience is not the least important actor in the play, and if it will not do its allotted share the play falls to pieces. The dramatist then is in the position of a tennis player who is left on the court with nobody to play with.*" The

playgoer who wants to get the best out of the players, has a duty to perform when he enters the theatre; if he sits indifferently in his stall, he can hardly blame the actors if they do little more than walk through their parts. Together, they can produce a divine spark causing the play to flame into a magnificence which neither could effect alone.

After over half-a-century on the stage, Julia Neilson looked back to the premiere of *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* at the Haymarket in 1900, and said in all sincerity: "It was the most wonderful first night I have ever known. There were five calls at the end of the first act, six calls at the end of the second, and after that I lost count. It was one of those glorious moments when one feels on top of all the world." Intoxicated by this warm welcome to management, it can be safely assumed that on that occasion Miss Neilson must have given "the most wonderful performance her public has ever known." She played Nell Gwyn hundreds and hundreds of times, but I am convinced that those people who sat in the Haymarket Theatre on the very first night of all saw the finest performance of all,



MATHESON LANG

with years of experience in the Provinces sets great store on the necessity of collaboration between actor and audience.

simply because by their enthusiasm and their exultation they made the evening the grandest occasion in the actress's lifetime.

Matheson Lang has not spent his life pandering to the tastes of sophisticated diners who fill so many rows of the West End stalls; he has devoted years to the Provinces, where the majority of people go to the theatre because they want to go, and

not merely in order to round off a dinner party. In the "Afterward" of his autobiography, he has some illuminating reflections to make concerning the relationship between serious actor and intelligent audience. He maintains that the real thrill of the actor's work is that union of player and playgoer which alone galvanises the play into palpitating life. "Nobody can foretell what the effect of a play will be until it has actually been performed before an audience. The audience makes the play. Over and over again one has found that lines and points which the author and the producer, sitting alone in an empty theatre at rehearsals, set great store by, go for nothing and pass almost unnoticed by a crowded audience, just as other points which seem unimportant at rehearsal leap into life and assume an unexpected significance." Finally summing up his life on the stage, Mr. Lang concludes that "the greatest glory of the actor's work is the sense of close communication, of mental understanding, and collaboration with his audience."

On the other hand, James Agate, who has spent a lifetime as critic in the theatre, holds that an actor is insensitive to the feeling of an audience. I quite fail to see how any critic can hold this view. I am convinced that Mr. Agate tells an after-dinner story much better when surrounded by a party of listeners with keen ears rather than by a collection of "puppets with heads of wood." And what, after all, is an actor—particularly a music-hall artist—but a raconteur writ large?

* * *

Refrain from charging the actor with flattery when he next professes to be your slave. He is inspired by your attentions; he thrives on your applause; without you, he is as helpless as a ventriloquist's doll. He is always the Trilby to your Svengali.

If you want to sleep in public, I suggest you choose the cinema, since the performance on the screen will be unaffected by your indifference, but go to the theatre with a keen mind, prepared to give the actor your whole-hearted attention and appreciation, and he will reward you as the screen can never do, for he will sense the mood of the particular audience of which you are a member, and play especially for your delight.

While on the stage, he rises to inspired heights, and you, in the auditorium, are drawn towards the edge of your seat, tingling with suppressed excitement. As the curtain falls, hardly able to stifle a hearty cheer, you will leave the theatre with a satisfaction and exhilaration quite foreign to film fans, for both you and the actor will have enjoyed yourselves to the full by playing together in perfect harmony. The theatre knows no finer teamwork.

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Beauty*



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in her movement grace ;*

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World of Ballet (Continued from page 17)

ballet remains dramatically expressive, with some dancing and grouping of great charm; for a first ballet it was, indeed, remarkably mature and finished, and Oliver Messel's exquisitely coloured designs and Purcell's music give it unusual artistic coherence. Helpmann's *Comus* is still a figure of almost frightening arrogant grace and baffled evil; Margaret Dale in the imaginatively conceived part of the Attendant Spirit has *fey* authority, and Moyra Fraser's attenuated height and long, beautiful hands have never been so effectively used as in the dances of *Sabrina*. The loveliest performance of the Lady remains that of Margot Fonteyn, a study in innocence born not of ignorance but of spiritual integrity, fragile in grace, but with an inner strength evil cannot touch.

New Books on the Ballet.

HELPMANN'S importance as a choreographer has been interestingly analysed this month in two new books on the ballet: Caryl Brahms' *Robert Helpmann* (Batsford, 18s.) and Arnold Haskell's *National Ballet* (Black, 10s. 6d.). It is, perhaps, a little premature to devote a book entirely to Helpmann's choreography, and therefore a pity that, in her comparative study of the Sadler's Wells choreographers, though she has with great generosity revised her original opinion of Ninette de Valois' superb ballet, *The Rake's Progress*, Miss Brahms gives such an incomplete impression of the work of Frederick Ashton. The brilliant but frivolous *Rendezvous* and *Patineurs* are, apart from the fine but early *Apparitions*, the only Ashton ballets mentioned, and there is no indication of Ashton's development in maturity and depth, and his rich creative sense of suffering and conflict, in such ballets as *Dante Sonata* and *The Wanderer*. It is beside such ballets as these that Helpmann's *Hamlet* should be judged. It can stand the comparison, and Miss Brahms' chapter on *Hamlet* is the best in her book. This book does not attempt to give more than a brief impression of Helpmann's achievement as a dancer and its insensibility to the value of his work in classical ballet, to which he has brought dignity, breeding and a fine-grained sense

of style and mime in the purest *danseur noble* tradition, is therefore unfortunate. (Lifar's "inspired conceit" is exactly the quality *Giselle* can do without, and Helpmann's unaffected sincerity and restraint are far nearer the spirit of the pre-Russian romantic ballet.) It is also difficult to reconcile Miss Brahms' opinion that Helpmann lacks "the gift of tears" with her statement that he "wrings our heart" in *Apparitions*. The book is, however, a generous tribute to a very great artist. Sedgwick's many photographs provide a magnificent record of Helpmann's three ballets, those of *Hamlet* giving a particularly vivid impression of décor, grouping and character, and Leslie Hurry's cover design has an artistic value book jackets rarely achieve.

* * *

Arnold Haskell, *doyen* of ballet critics since the death of Svetloff and Levinson, has been too long absent from the literature of ballet and his new book is a timely reassertion of some basic truths. Mr. Haskell's most valuable qualities as a critic are his ability to look at ballet "in the round," recognising the best, without prejudice, in whichever form or style it may occur; his realisation that in ballet one can never cease to learn; and a rich store of knowledge gained from studying ballet not only from "in front," but also from the *inside*, in classroom, rehearsal room and conversation with the finest creative minds working in the various companies. His present book is a study of the historical background, formation and development of Sadler's Wells Ballet, with a lucid analysis of its present and future functions as the English National Ballet. There is much commonsensical writing on the problem of the immature dancer, the dancer's need for a fuller general education, and the essential subordination of technique to artistry, as well as a balanced survey of the Wells' three choreographers, Ashton, de Valois and Helpmann. This is a book which should do much to counteract the muddled thinking that afflicts ballet to-day, especially among the more destructive theorists at whom Miss de Valois tilts a lamentably unrepentant and witty lance in her preface.

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AMATEUR STAGE

Notes and Topics

ENFIELD has an amateur repertory theatre which has specialised in original work. At St. Stephen's Hall, Bush Hill Park, on November 10th-11th, a new domestic comedy, *Close the Door*, by Hilda Ingram, is to be produced. Mr. James B. Bisset is the director, and he informs us that while the present company is small, owing to war call-up reasons, it musters twenty-five acting members. Productions average one a month, and since last April five new plays have been staged. Some, Mr. Bisset admits, would not stand a chance on the professional stage, "but they are good experience both for my players and for the authors who can see their work performed before an audience. That is one of my objects, to help the struggling author to develop style and the right technique to produce winners."

ENQUIRIES reach this journal for London groups in production who need new members, but often the would-be player specifies a home district which, on our records, is barren of societies. Yet there must be numerous groups at work, evidence of which is to be found in an event like the Toynbee Hall Drama Festival. Here is the November fixture list: 6th, Richmond Shakespeare Society in *Twelfth Night*; Austrian Centre Players in *Hope for Tomorrow*; Farnborough Catholic Youth Club in *Spreading the News*. 13th, Angel Players in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*; Conway Players in *Deep Waters*; Finlayson Players in *Prelude to a Tragedy*. 20th, Beaufort House Players in *A Hundred Years Old*; Mary Ward Players in *Over-ruled*; Query Players in *Paolo and Francesca*. 27th, Daniel Street Players in *Cats of Egypt*; Sheen Players in *Yet I Ride the Little Horse*; Chigwell Row Women's Institute in *The Merchant of Venice*.

Final of this section of the Festival is on December 4th, with Mr. Tyrone Guthrie adjudicating.

Burning Gold, a play by Falkland L. Cary and A. A. Thomson (Samuel French), is finding favour with a number of groups. It is a play of which a British Drama League critic said: "It has a third act as effective as either of the others. I don't think your

Continued overleaf

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"Northampton Press" on Northampton première September, 1943

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TYRONE GUTHRIE (Final Performance)

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Echoes from Broadway

(Continued from page 25)

Hammerstein II (who previously has made fame with Jerome Kern) has fitted appropriate lyrics and contributed an adequate book. In casting, the Guild has concentrated on actual ability, rather than names, and in Alfred Drake and Joan Roberts we have two comparative newcomers, but a love-team that is young and refreshingly charming, who really do justice to the score. Another magnificent contribution to the success of *Oklahoma!* is the choreography by Agnes de Mille. For the dances have been mixed ingeniously with the story and there is just enough cowboy thrown into the ballet arrangements to make their mark with that section of the theatre-going public hitherto considered hard-boiled about that sort of thing. Our enthusiasm for the dancing in *Oklahoma!* is unbounded and we were disappointed not to have been given another number in the second act to really send you dancing on to the streets.

As it is, from the moment the curtain goes up you are captivated by the setting:

(Continued in next Column)

Amateur Stage

(Continued from previous page)

play could have a higher commendation than that."

Bailey's Crowded Hour, a one-act comedy by A. J. Talbot, is now published by H. F. W. Deane & Sons. This is an intelligent piece, with the author poking fun at cinema and science. Its staging calls for rather bright courage and ingenuity by a stage manager not afraid to cope with laboratory gadgets of the year A.D. 102,000.

Miscellaneous Announcements

WANTED—Pictorial supplements of plays by Anthony, Coward, Druten, Hay, Lonsdale, Priestley, Rattigan, Williams. C. Dutton, 45, Lumley Road, Skegness.

THE NEW ERA ACADEMY of Drama and Music (London) Ltd. Tuition in Elocution, Phonetics, Sinus Tone Production (Speech), Stage Technique, Piano and Singing, etc. Public Examinations held, including English for Foreigners. Syllabus and Particulars on application. State which branch required on stamped addressed envelope to Secretary, 17, Cavendish Square, W.1.

EVENING THEATRE SCHOOL—"The Theatre as an Art." Speech and Stage Technique. Acting, Writing, Production. New Term January. Details from Elisabeth Dutton, 92, Gt. Russell Street, W.C.1. (Museum 7379.)

WANTED KNOWN—Congenial Friendships are quickly formed through the U.C.C. For particulars, write Secretary, T.W., 5, Hay Street, Braughing, Herts. Est. in 1905.

an unforgettable picture of the wide open spaces, and Alfred Drake's singing of "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," "Oh, What a Beautiful Day." You feel the freshness and freedom of a great country, something you would fight to the last acre to preserve. And you think instinctively of other countries that must have felt the same way about protecting a land they have loved for centuries. The other song hits include: "The Surry with the Fringe on the Top," "People Will Say," and a rousing choral number, "Oklahoma!" Other outstanding members of the cast are Joseph Buoff, Betty Garde, Celeste Holm, Lee Dixon, George Church, Marc Platt and Katharine Sergava. The settings are by Lemuel Ayers, the costumes by Miles White and direction by Rouben Mamoulian.

Oklahoma! is undoubtedly here for the duration. It can never grow old, but its freshness must be retained throughout if it is to continue to win the ecstatic praise of theatregoers twelve months from now. After that we would like the Theatre Guild to ship it to London and let British audiences take a look at what must be one of the most unusual and successful musicals in years.

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